

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 258
INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2768

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, CH, AS, NZ
SUBJECT: PRC PROTEST HARASSMENT OF VESSELS

REF: STATE 087454

1. PRC AMBASSADOR CHOW CALLED IN DFA DEPUTY SECRETARY ROWLAND ON APRIL 7, 1977 AND SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED BY PEKING TO PROTEST AUSTRALIAN HARASSMENT OF CHINESE OCEANOGRAPHIC RESEARCH VESSELS. CHOW SAID THAT ON MARCH TWO CHINESE OCEANOGRAPHIC RESEARCH VESSELS WERE CONDUCTING SCIENTIFIC TEST IN THE PACIFIC. THEIR NAMES WERE THE HSIANG YANG HUNG NO. 5 AND THE HSIANG YANG HUNG NO. 12. BETWEEN 0750 HOURS AND 1035 HOURS PEKING TIME ON THAT DATE AN AUSTRALIAN AIRFORCE AIRCRAFT CIRCLED TWICE AT LOW ALTITUDE OVER NO. 5 AND ONCE OVER NO. 12. THIS INTERFERED WITH THE NORMAL NAVIGATION AND OPERATION OF THE VESSELS. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT CHINA CONSIDERED THAT THIS ACTION DID NOT ACCORD WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW GOVERNING NAVIGATION ON THE HIGH SEAS. HE HOPED THAT THE AUSTRALIAN
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GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE PROMPT MEASURES TO PREVENT ANY RECURRENCE OF THIS KIND OF ACTION. THE APPROXIMATE POSITION OF THE TWO SHIPS WAS AS FOLLOWS:
LATITUDE 10 DEGREES - 14 DEGREES SOUTH
LONGITUDE 177 DEGREES WEST - 179 DEGREES EAST

2. IN REPLY TO ROLAND'S QUESTION, CHOW AGREED THAT THIS

PUT THE CHINESE VESSELS SOMEWHERE NORTH OF FIJI. ROWLANFC RECALLED A SIMILAR INCIDENT HAD OCCURED IN 1976 AND ON THAT OCCASION CHOU'S PREDECESSOR HAD ALSO MADE REPRESENTATIONS. ROWLAND ASSURED CHOU THAT THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE DEPARTMENT HAD ASSURED THAT THE AIRCRAFT WAS NOT AUSTRALIAN. THE SPOT WHERE THE EARLIER INCIDENT WAS REPORTED TO HAVE OCCURED WAS A LONG WAY FROM AUSTRALIA, CLOSER TO QTE OTHER COUNTRIES. END QTE SINCE DFA HAD BEEN NOTIFIED IN ADVANCE OF THE MATTER CHOU CHOSE TO RAISE, ROWLAND HAD AGAIN CHECKED WITH DEFENCE AUTHORITIES. DEFENCE REPLIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO RPT NO CONTACT BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN AIRCRAFT AND CHINESE SHIPS. ROWLAND AGREED TO FORWARD THE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF THE APPROXIMATE POSITION OF THE SHIPS GIVEN BY CHOU TO SEEK DEFENCE CONFIRMATION OF THIS DENIAL. ROWLAND ALSO ADDED THAT IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY CONTACT THE EARLIER CHECK WOULD HAVE REVEALED IT.

3. CHOU SAID THAT THE PLANE HAD FLOWN AT AN EXTREMELY LOW ALTITUDE AND THE INSIGNIA ON IT WERE CLEARLY VISIBLE. ROWLAND COUNTERED THAT AUSTRALIA WAS NOT THE ONLY COUNTRY TO USE THAT INSIGNIA BUT THAT THE DFA WOULD CHECK AGAIN. ROWLAND ALSO REMARKED THAT IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT TO EXCHANGE IDENTIFICATION. CHOU, PERHAPS NOT ENTIRELY UNDERSTANDING THIS POINT, SAID THAT THIS WAS FINE IN YOUR OWN TERRITORIAL WATERS BUT NOT ON THE OPEN SEA.

4. COMMENT: THE GOA IS SOMEWHAT MYSTIFIED WHY THE PRC WOULD TAKE SUCH A STRONG VIEW OF A SHIP FLY-OVER. THE GOA IS ALSO CONVINCED THAT THIS WAS PROBABLY A NEW ZEALAND AIRCRAFT. END COMMENT.

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